

KING ALFONSO WINS BOTH PRESTIGE AND POPULARITY

His Recent Action in Cabinet Crisis Wins People's Approbation.

What Advent of First Conservative Cabinet Involves to Spanish Court.

Young King Alfonso's attitude in connection with the recent ministerial crisis at Madrid astonished people both at home and abroad by the precocity which it indicated, and has served to increase both his prestige and his popularity. For when Senor Sagasta tendered the resignation of his Liberal administration at the beginning of November, in consequence of irreconcilable differences among his colleagues, the youthful monarch, who will not be seventeen until next May, declined to call the Conservatives into council, or to intrust them in the formation of a cabinet without a defeat of the Liberal, that is to say, the ministerial, party in parliament.

Ever since the time when Spain was endowed with a constitutional form of government the invariable practice has been for the changes of the cabinet to be made at Madrid without any regard to the majority in the chamber of deputies. Administrations were dismissed by the crown, or else resigned of their own accord, either when they had ceased to enjoy the confidence and good-will of the monarch, or else when by divisions among themselves they had rendered further co-operation with one another in an administration a matter of impossibility. When a cabinet went out of office the sovereign would call on one of the leaders of the opposition to form an administration, indifferent to the fact that he had no legislative majority in the house. That was a mere trifle for subsequent arrangement. For as soon as the new premier had formed his ministry he secured from the throne a decree dissolving the cortes. Thereupon he would at once proceed to fill all the offices, especially those in the provinces, with his friends and adherents, and as soon as this was accomplished the general election would take place, the new appointees maneuvering the latter in such a fashion as to return an overwhelming ministerial majority. That has been the invariable custom.

The parliamentary majority has always been manufactured after the formation of the cabinet by artificial means in order to satisfy the needs of the administration instead of the latter being organized to conform with the requirements and views of the parliamentary majority in existence at the time of its being intrusted with office. It is this knowledge and assurance that the parliamentary majority would always show an overwhelming majority for the administration that happened to be in power when the general election took place that has exercised such a blighting influence upon popular government in Spain, for it has served to keep a very large and important element of the population from casting its ballots on the ground that no matter how one voted the government would always win. King Alfonso is endeavoring to reform these methods, and the Spanish people at large are grateful to him for the determined fight he has made to accomplish the end he had in view. For an entire month he held out, compelling Sagasta to remain at the head of affairs, until at length the aged premier sustained a defeat in the cortes, when the monarch accepted his resignation and summoned the Conservatives to power, this being, I believe, the first instance in Spanish history of a change of cabinet following a ministerial defeat in the cortes.

The King's Reasons.

There were other reasons why the King was anxious to keep the Liberals, and especially Senor Sagasta, at the helm. He knew that if he intrusted the formation of a cabinet to the Conservatives it would involve a general election, which in the present disturbed condition of the kingdom is likely to lead to fresh popular outbreaks and troubles. The last general election took place only a year ago, and gave rise to rioting of a more or less sanguinary character throughout the kingdom, and Don Alfonso was anxious to preserve the country from being subjected to another such trial. He, therefore, urged Senor Sagasta to endeavor even at the cost of concessions made to his foes to reconstruct a Liberal cabinet, and the old premier, who had been Queen Christina's principal mentor during her regency, and to whom the young King had been bound by special ties of affection and regard since his earliest childhood, made every possible effort to satisfy his monarch's wishes, actually going to the length of offering a portfolio to the dissident Conservative leader, Romero Robledo.

The latter's pretensions, however, were so extreme, especially with regard to patronage, that the negotiations came to naught, and Sagasta, after having excited the suspicion and ill-will of his own followers by offering concessions to the extreme radicals, and the denunciations of the latter by his attempts to bring Conservatives into his administration, managed to form a cabinet that inspired such universal lack of confidence that it was defeated last week in the cortes through the refusal of a large body of the Liberal party to vote in its favor.

Silvelas was thereupon summoned to the palace, and has now formed a Conservative administration, the first since King Alfonso has attained his majority, and in which the three principal members are Senor Villaverde, who is the minister of finance; Senor Gato, the minister of justice, and General Linarez, who was so badly wounded at the battle

of Santiago, the minister of war. Moreover the cortes has been dissolved, and a new general election ordered, which will take place about next April, which will give time to the new administration to so reorganize the entire system of provincial government as to assure an overwhelming Conservative majority at the polls.

Senor Silvelas' Record.

Senor Silvelas, fortunately for the King, is one of the most honored and sterling figures in the political life of Spain. He has much in common with the French ex-Premier Waldeck-Rousseau, and like the latter has been the leader of the bar of his country, sacrificing the largest and most lucrative practice in Spain when he accepted the premiership shortly after the war with this country. He severed his connection with the legal profession on that occasion, not only for the period that he was to remain in office, but also for the subsequent portion of his career, on grounds which afford a remarkable illustration of his high-mindedness and integrity. The reason which he gave for leaving the bar was that the custom of ex-premiers and ex-cabinet ministers figuring as counsel in court is not calculated to promote the impartiality of judges or to inspire popular confidence in the latter's strict sense of justice.

All over the continent of Europe the judges are subordinate to the government, and depend upon the premier and upon the minister of justice for their promotion and distinctions of one kind and another. Now a judge knowing this, and finding among the counsel in his court a lawyer who has already once held the office of cabinet minister, who is likely to become a cabinet minister again, will naturally be tempted to earn the latter's good-will by granting decisions in favor of the cause he represents. At any rate any judgment that the bench might deliver in favor of the cause would be exposed to the

suspicion of partiality. Senor Silvelas' action created an immense amount of discussion at the time, but was warmly commended, both at home and abroad, as the setting of a singularly high standard of honor in political life. His attitude in this, however, is in keeping with the remainder of his career. He, as well as Senor Villaverde, to whom he has now intrusted the treasury department, preferred to resign their portfolios in the Conservative cabinet of the late Canovas del Castillo, ten years ago, rather than to be parties to the policy of Don Romero Robledo, then minister of justice, in hushing up the scandals in connection with the extraordinary corruption and dishonesty of the municipality of Madrid, notably of the then mayor and political boss, Senor Bosch, an intimate friend and political associate of Robledo.

A Plot Recalled.

On yet another occasion when a movement was organized by Robledo and certain Conservative ministers to transfer the regency from the young King's mother to his aunt, the Infanta Isabella, on the ground that Christina was a foreigner, and the princess entitled to it as the nearest of the grown up Spanish born relatives of the King, Silvelas declined to have anything to do with the plot, warned the Queen of its existence, and brought the whole affair to naught. In fact, his name throughout the length and breadth of Spain is synonymous with everything that is honorable and loyal, and as such he commands the respect of all parties, even of his foes, chief among whom is, of course, Romero Robledo, the personification of all that is most corrupt in Spanish politics.

Silvelas, while he can be very eloquent, is as a rule rather cold, concise, and sober of speech. His manner, though courteous, conveys an impression of reserve, and his distaste for everything that is theatrical and showy is most pro-

nounced. Thoroughly a master of himself he is in consequence thereof well qualified to act as the master of others, and while his policy is likely to prove of a reactionary character, it will at any rate be one of action. For he is altogether opposed to Sagasta's methods of "laissez aller," of letting things slide until they settle themselves, of compromise and of conciliation at all cost. According to him the reins of government must be kept well in hand, and the dominant note of his administration will be its vigor.

Change for Weal or Woe.

While the helm of the Spanish ship of state is now in the hands of a pilot possessed of a much firmer grasp and of more decision of character than easy-going old Sagasta, the very personification of the Spanish "manana," it remains to be seen whether the change will be for the weal or for the woe of the Iberian kingdom. In the first place the administration feels that the political sympathies of the King and of his mother are rather with the Liberals than with the Conservatives. At least that is the popular inference drawn from Don Alfonso's manifest reluctance to part with Sagasta. Then, too, the presence of a Tory cabinet in power will have the effect of removing from the ultra-radical and republican wing of the Liberal party all that restraint which had been imposed upon its anti-dynastic aspirations by the fact that the Liberals were in office and Sagasta at the head of affairs. In Catalonia especially the republican movement and the home rule agitation are certain to become more acute than heretofore since the people of this, the manufacturing and industrial province par excellence, realize that they have less to hope in the way of concessions from Silvelas than from Sagasta, and that they are certain to be treated with greater rigor and held in check with a far sterner hand.

The entire anti-clerical element will also be arrayed against the government, that anti-clerical element which styles itself the National Union, and in deference to the demands of which the Sagasta government enacted last summer that sweeping decree for the regulation of re-

ligious schools and religious education, a blow, in fact, at the religious orders of the kingdom. The decree was signed. But inasmuch as Silvelas and the Conservatives bitterly opposed it in the cortes, it is doubtful whether, now that they are in office, they will apply the law.

Suppression of Clergy.

Then there is the question of the wholesale suppression of archbishops and bishops, on the score of economy, and the taxation of the religious orders, to which the late government stood committed in deference to popular clamor, but to which the present administration has expressed itself as opposed.

These are but a few of the popular issues, which are certain to develop at a very early stage into sources of popular disturbances and risings against the government, and possibly also against the throne. The sentiment at the present moment in Spain is overwhelmingly in favor of administrative and economic reform, of progress, of decentralization—in one word, of Liberalism. And it is a Conservative government that is in power for no other reason than that the Liberals are so divided among themselves, so rent asunder into rival factions, as to render their continuance in office for the moment impossible. Add to these elements of discordance, Romero Robledo and his fellow dissident Conservatives, who openly avow their preference for their party, such as it is, to the dynasty, and who are bitterly opposed to Silvelas; and General Weyler, who now that he has lost the portfolio of war feels that he has missed his chance of becoming a military dictator and is ripe for mischief, and you find that the outlook in Spain is singularly stormy and threatening, both for the new cabinet and for the young King.

EX-ATTACHE.

REFUND DUTY ON COAL.

A measure relative to the coal problem has been introduced in the House. The bill is by Representative Hill of Connecticut, and provides that there shall be allowed and paid, under such regulations as the Secretary of the Treasury shall prescribe, on all coal of every kind and form imported into any port on the Atlantic Coast a drawback of the import duties paid, to and including the 30th day of June, 1903.

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